

## FOCUS

## DHAKA-SYLHET HIGHWAY

## Reducing Distance in Cost-effective Ways

by Shahidur Rahman Khan

WORK on planning for improvement of Dhaka-Sylhet highway has been taken up by the consultants of Roads and Highways Department of the government. The probable alternatives are: a) Development of the existing road with minor straightening here and there; and b) Finding out the socio-economically most cost-effective alignment considering the tangible and non-tangible benefits.

The different alternative alignments as a whole were not comparatively considered in previous three studies. The studies concentrated on the existing alignment and gave their recommendations accordingly.

Available GIS and topographical information shows that development of only 52-km road will reduce:

- Dhaka-Sylhet distance by 44 km; from 274 km to 230 km.

- Dhaka-Habiganj distance by 30 km; from 177 km to 147 km.

The first alternative requires less investment and involves minimum queries during review and scrutiny. It requires less field and desk work. The second requires detailed knowledge of the topography and the socio-economic condition of the region. It requires more field and desk work.

If the easy approach is pursued, the probability of providing faster communication facilities to the millions of taxpayers in the north-eastern region and the possibility of giving impetus to the socio-economic development of the region will be shunted for a long time in the future. This article is intended to bring a socio-economically highly viable, environmentally acceptable and locally desired alternative to the focus for attention of all concerned.

## The Dhaka-Sylhet

## Highway

National/international highways carry high volume of speedy traffic over hundreds of kilometers at all times of the year. In planning and evaluation of a highway project, the non-tangible factors like comfort, safety and security of traffic, socio-economic development of neighborhood etc., are also given due consideration as the tangible factors like distance, economic gains etc. Up-

grading of an existing road needs less immediate investment but development of a new alignment may be cost-effective in the long run due to shorter distance and/or due to socio-economic benefits. Highway project which may cause non-mitigable adverse impact on the environment should not be implemented, whatever economic benefit it may have.

The present Dhaka-Sylhet highway is the outcome of isolated piecemeal developments of existing country road over a long period of time. No professional technical expertise was involved in the fixation of the alignment. The 274-km-long highway can be divided into three sectors.

- About 95 km long Dhaka-Sarail portion.
- About 139 km long Sarail-Sherpur portion.
- About 40 km long Sherpur-Sylhet portion.

The Sarail-Sherpur portion passes in a winding circuitous way through the hills, forests and tea gardens. The sharp curves and steep gradients of this sector is not suitable for speedy traffic. Widening of the road and flattening of the steep gradients will require huge expenditure and will also necessitate the destruction of existing very limited forests causing non-mitigable damage to the fragile eco-system. The jungle hideouts are safe havens of anti-social elements for committing crimes and occasional robberies on this portion of highway.

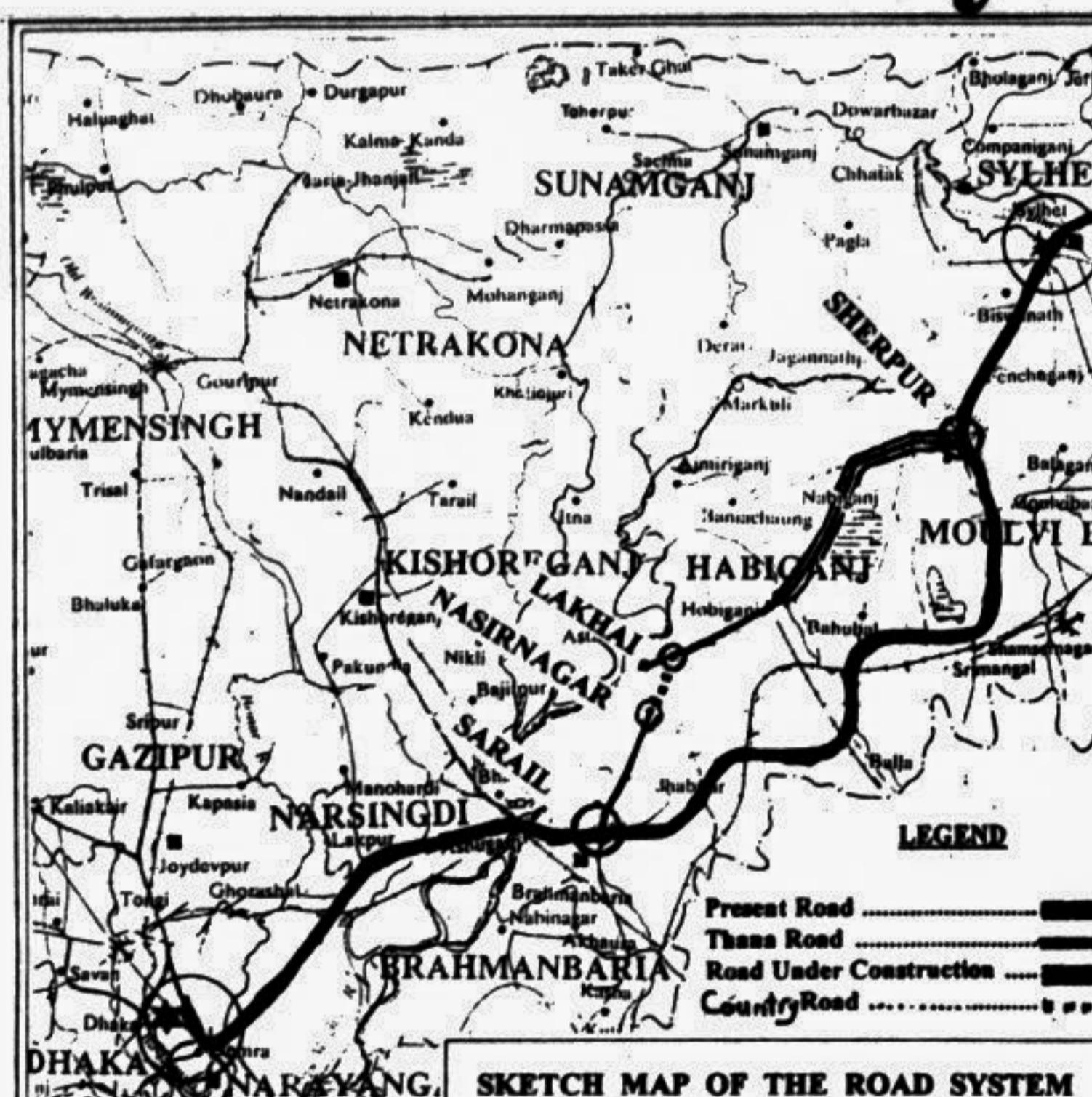
A covetous substitute is the development of the shorter 95 km stretch of Sarail-Nasirnagar-Lakhai-Habiganj-Nabiganj-Sherpur route which passes all along through plain land. The present and the proposed alignment are shown in the map. Section-wise present position of the proposed alignment is as follows:

- About 22 km : Existing Sarail-Nasirnagar thana road up to Fandaik requiring improvement.
- About 10 km: Country road between Nasirnagar-Lakhai requiring development.
- About 20 km: Habiganj-Bamai portion of the existing Habiganj-Lakhai thana road requiring further development.
- About 43 km : Under con-

struction Habiganj-Nabiganj-Sherpur road. ECNEC has approved Tk. 330m on 17.10.96 for upgrading it to regional highway with 5.49 km wide road pavement. Tk. 40m has been spent in the year '96-'97 and there is a budget provision of Tk. 80m in this year's ADP for this road. This is going to reduce the Habiganj-Sylhet distance by 44 km (35 per cent) from the present 127 km to 83 km.

Some of the advantages of the proposed alignment are:

**Reduction of distance:** Comparative statement of reduction in distance is given in the table. The reduction in distance will save construction cost during



SKETCH MAP OF THE ROAD SYSTEM

**Safety and Security of Traffic:** The road passing all along through the plains will make criminal activities and robberies difficult.

**Saving of forests and Tea Gardens:** Minimum 20-25 per cent forest cover for the land area of a country is recommended for ecological balance. Less than 10 per cent land area of our country is presently under forest cover. This percentage is further shrinking due to uncontrollable deforestation by individuals and institutions.

The proposed alternative alignment will save a large portion of forest areas and prevent many tea gardens from destruction.

## Connection of 1 District 3 Thana Headquarters to National Highway

The construction of the suggested route will have the advantage of availability of an alternate route (the present one), in case of calamity or other obstruction. The collapse of Shaistaganj bridge during the July '97 flood, causing the isolation of Sylhet region for weeks is a recent example of such a necessity. The construction works on the new alignment will not disturb the pre-

## Provision of Alternate Route

The construction of the suggested route will have the advantage of availability of an alternate route (the present one), in case of calamity or other obstruction. The collapse of Shaistaganj bridge during the July '97 flood, causing the isolation of Sylhet region for weeks is a recent example of such a necessity. The construction works on the new alignment will not disturb the pre-

sent traffic movement during the development period. Diversification of highway will remove the endemic traffic jam of Moulibazar, Srimangal and such other places. The existing highway, without any further investment, will serve the regional demand for a long time in the future.

The writer is a consulting engineer

## Reforms Establish a Modern Industrial System in China

by Swapan Saha

CHINA, with painstaking efforts, had established a state-owned industrial system over the 30 years since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. But the rapid pace of economic reforms it undertook since opening up of its economy to outside world in 1978 has transformed the world's perception of China.

The ongoing reforms in China have brought its large and medium-sized state-owned enterprises to the foreground to provide unforeseen benefits to the vast population of the People's Republic.

The efforts aiming at modernisation of 1000 state-owned productive enterprises would redefine ownership pattern as well as obligations of the enterprises.

Property rights have already made the economy dynamic while separation of the functions of the government from those of the enterprises created newer scope for more scientific and modern management.

The Chinese government has, without ambiguity, made it abundantly clear at the outset that the reforms would totally modernise its industrial system combining socialist principle of public ownership with norms of free market economy to make the large and medium sized state-owned enterprises the real backbone of its unique market economy.

In 1996 China's gross domestic product (GDP) totalled 6.779.5 billion yuan, a 9.7 per cent increase over the previous year's calculated in constant prices and 5.4 times that of

Foreign trade and exchange control reform have given enterprises accessibility to the disposal of their foreign exchange earnings, simplified approval procedure and speeded up the flow of such earnings.

Over the past 15 years China's Gross National Product (GNP) increased by 2.78 times, at an average annual increase rate of 9.3 per cent. The growth rate is among the highest in the world. Industrial reforms have, no doubt, contributed to it. Starting in 1978 China completed its first phase of industrial reform in 1984. The main idea during this period was to give more decision making powers to enterprises for allowing them to make more profits and attaching with it the obligation of running the enterprises and their employees for their own economic benefits.

Starting in October, 1984 the second phase ended in 1991. Efforts were made to separate the functions of government from those of running the enterprises. It was made clear that state-owned enterprises were economic entities that operate on their own with responsibilities for their own losses or profits. Different economic liability systems were established on this basis.

The third and the most decisive period of China's industrial reform began in 1992. Policy readjustments began to pave way for the creation of a new industrial system to make the enterprises independent corporate entities in conformity with the needs of the socialist market economy but capable to compete on both the international and domestic market.

Deng Xiaoping is widely respected as the architect of modern China and at the same time he is credited by all for dreaming and launching the reforms in 1978.

It was he who infused a new vigour, particularly among the young generation for establishing themselves as worthy citizens to build a new and happy social life in a decent way.

No wonder his pragmatic concept caught the imagination.

## BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

## Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 39th Prosecution Witness

Brigade.

Q : What was the number of your tank?

A : I can't recall.

Q : Had the tanks a log book?

A : Yes.

Q : From where you took fuel for the tank?

A : It was fuelled earlier. We didn't have to go anywhere to fuel the tanks. Fuel is taken to the tanks.

(Court : When the tank was filled with fuel? Before August 15?)

A : 8/10 days before.

Q : Is the tank filled with fuel for an all time preparation?

A : The tanks are fuelled so that we can go for an operation any time.

Q : In a tank prepared for an operation any time?

A : Yes.

Q : What is the highest and lowest speed of a tank?

A : It is a state secret. Will it be wise to disclose it?

(Court : You can tell the speed.)

A : Highest 45 kilometres and lowest 6 to 7 kilometres.

Q : Did you not ask where you were going?

A : At first we reached in front of the 3rd gate at the directive of my tank commander — Later he asked to drive the tank towards Bangabhaban.

The court was adjourned keeping the cross-examination by Khan Saifur incomplete.

Earlier, advocate TM Akbar, lawyer for accused Lt Col (LPR) Muhiddin and advocate Abdur Razzaq Khan, counsel for accused Hon Capt (retd) Abdul Wahab Joardar declined to examine the witness.

—UNB

Further texts of cross examination will be published as and when received.

By Hanna-Barbera



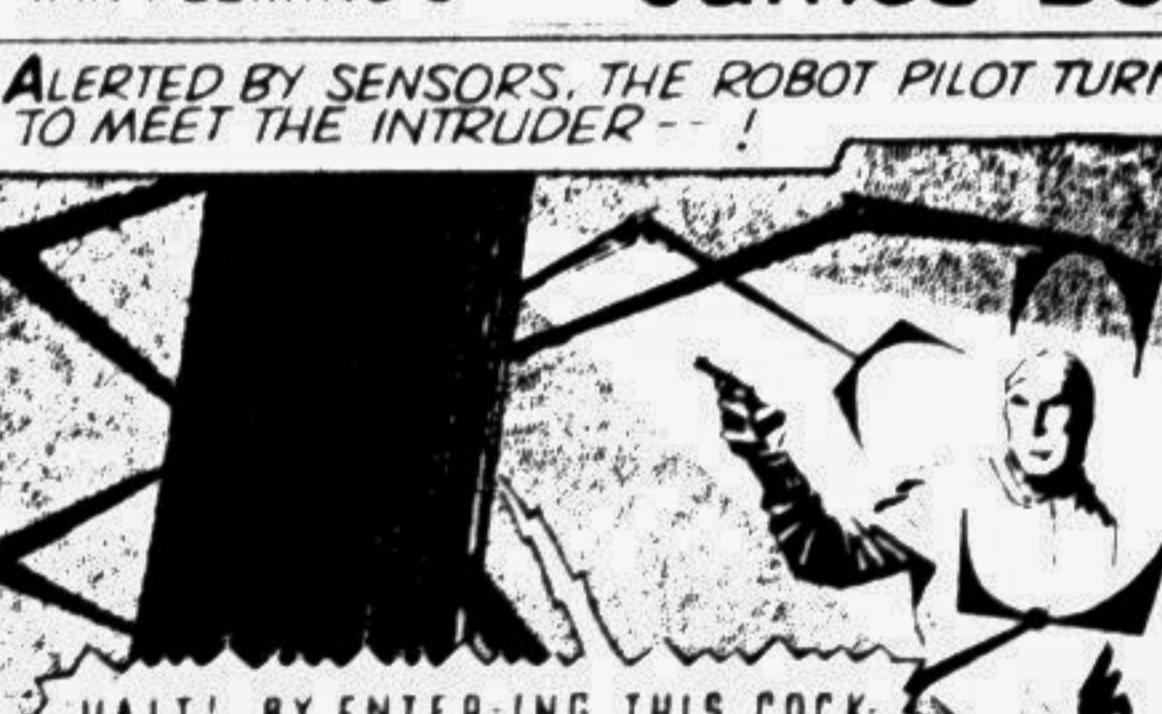
## Tom and Jerry

MOUSE... FUR BEARING MAMMAL LARGE EARS STEALS CHEESE IS AN EXCELLENT SOURCE OF PROTEIN.



IAN FLEMING'S James Bond

BE SEN-SIBLE AND SUR-RENDER AT ONCE! I AM NOT PRO-GRAMMED TO YIELD TO THREATS!



DRAWN BY JOHN McLUSKY

## Walkathon in Ctg today

Chittagong Grammar School will hold a Walkathon today in aid of the Literacy Centre of Milon community Support Network. The Walkathon will begin at 8 am, says a press release.

## Bangladeshi national wins SAARC Youth Award

A Bangladeshi national has won the SAARC Youth Award '97, reports UNB.

It said M Sukur Salek won the award for his impressive record of service and achievement in community welfare projects.

The SAARC Youth Awards Scheme was introduced by the SAARC Ministerial Conference on Youth in South Asia held in Male in May 1994.

Salek will receive the award at the coming 19th session of the SAARC Council of Ministers to be held in Male on November 29-30.

## Chehlaam

Chehlaam of Jamila Khatun, wife of former EPSCS late Md Anisur Rahman, will be held today after Magrib prayers at the residence of the deceased's only son W R Tawheed, DGM Public Relation, Janata Bank, at Century Tower, Moghbazar in the city, says a press release.

## Diabetes and endocrine conference held

By Staff Correspondent

This is a very important occasion for us as it gives a chance to gather and exchange ideas about extensive medical research," said Health and Family Welfare Minister Salauddin Yusuf while inaugurating the 3rd Diabetes and Endocrine Conference last Sunday at the Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) as special guest. It was jointly organised by Diabetic Association of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Endocrine Society.

The conference was attended by guest medical experts from USA, Sweden and Germany and other countries. The two day programme included, plenary lecture session on Clinical Medicine and the Public Health in Bangladesh, Health Economics and Free Paper session.

## Consular section of US embassy closed on Nov 20

The consular section of the United States Embassy in Dhaka will be closed on November 20. Emergency services for the American citizens will, however, continue. Immigrant visa applicants having appointments on November 20 should come to the consular section the following week for their interviews, says a US press release.

## German cardiac surgeons due in city Nov 26

By Staff Correspondent

A team of specialists from the Department of Cardiac Surgery of the University of Hamburg, Germany will be visiting the Combined Military Hospital (CMH), Dhaka from Nov 26. They will work with the Cardiovascular Surgery and the Cardiology Departments of the CMH, Dhaka for four weeks. During their stay in Dhaka the German Cardiac Surgeons will take part in open heart surgery including coronary bypass surgery of adult patients, says an ISPR press release.

Considering the overall requirement of Bangladesh, the team will lay special emphasis on the coronary bypass surgery and the interested patients have been requested to report as soon as possible to the Department of Cardiovascular Surgery of the Combined Military Hospital, Dhaka. Heart patients for bypass surgery are required to bring with them their angiography film and report while other cardiac patients are to bring Colour Doppler and other documents related to their ailment.

## Eye camp begins in Khulna

KHULNA, Nov 13: A four-day eye camp organised by Food and Relief International began under Khulna on Tuesday. reports BSS.

## Obituary

Safa Khatun, wife of late Khondkar Mohiuddin Ahmed, a government school teacher of Rajshahi, died after prolonged illness at the PG Hospital in the city on Tuesday night. She was 72, reports BSS.

She left behind four sons and three daughters.

The qul khawani of Safa Khatun will be held at 4 pm today at the residence of her eldest son Khondkar Tajuddin Ahmed, joint secretary (press) Ministry of Information, at 24/2 Tajmahal Road, Mohamadpur.

## Memorial meeting on Ranesh Dasgupta held

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a memorial meeting in the city Wednesday said that late journalist-litterateur Ranesh Dasgupta worked throughout his life in favour of a non-communal and progressive society, reports BSS.

The meeting was organised by 'Ganongsangkruti Parishad' at its office with its president Prof M Nurunnabi in the chair. It was addressed, among others, by journalists Abu Salek, Safai Alam, Abul Kashem, Abdul Wadud.

## Memorial meeting on Tasadduk Hossain tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

A memorial meeting will be held in observance of the second death anniversary of freedom fighter and ideological leader of professionals Tasadduk Hossain tomorrow, says a press release.

The meeting organised by Tasadduk Hossain, Smriti Paribar Kallyan Parishad will be held at auditorium of the Biswa Sahitya Kendra at 3 pm.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Cultural Affairs will be present as chief guest while Mahmudur Rahman, former MP, Abul Kasem Chowdhury, Kazi Habibur Rahman, Ashraf Ali Khan, advocate Monirul Islam and Nuruddin Sheikh will be the special guests.

The proposal for establishing MCS initiated by the Ministry of Law about five months back was subsequently given clearance by the Ministry of Establishment.

Sources at the Ministry of Law apprehended uncertainty regarding the clearance of MCS file from the Ministry of Finance on grounds that the proposal was sent there following clearance by the Ministry of Establishment and creation of posts about three months ago.

According to them the officials of the Ministry of Finance were raising various queries regarding administrative aspects of the MCS.